INTRODUCTION OF A BILL TO PERMIT REASONABLE COST REIMBURSEMENTS FOR EMERGENCY ROOM SERVICES PROVIDED BY FEDERALLY QUALIFIED HEALTH CENTERS

HON. ED CASE

OF HAWAII

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 22, 2003

Mr. CASE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce a bill to permit reasonable cost reimbursements for emergency room services provided by Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs).

We are all well aware of the important role FQHCs play in our medically underserved communities. FQHCs exist in areas where economic, geographic, or cultural barriers limit access to primary health care, and they tailor their services to community needs.

There are some FQHCs that go above and beyond the usual scope of services by not only providing primary and preventive care, but also meeting the emergency care needs in their communities. For these services, FQHCs are not currently eligible for reimbursement; they should be.

A great example is the Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center (WCCHC) in an underserved area of Oahu in Hawaii. The WCCHC is a community-owned and operated non-profit medical facility that serves an ever-growing population of approximately 50,000 residents. Around seventy percent of the WCCHC's patients live on incomes below the national poverty level. About seventy-five percent of all WCCHC patients do not have health insurance. Nearly fifty percent of the WCCHC's patients are of Native Hawaiian ancestry.

The WCCHC—which has been recognized for service excellence both locally and nationally—runs the only emergency medical facility on the Waianae Coast. The nearest alternative site for emergency medical care is twenty miles away. I am sure you will agree that this is quite a lengthy journey to make in a critical situation where every second matters. The WCCHC emergency room provides patients with the care they need close to home, in a facility with which they are familiar, and with a staff that both patients and families know and trust. In 1999 alone, the WCCHC emergency staff handled more than 12,000 cases.

FQHCs like the Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center that provide these vital services should be able to receive reasonable reimbursements for the emergency care of their patients. I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

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INTRODUCTION OF THE VOTER CONFIDENCE AND INCREASED ACCESSIBILITY ACT OF 2003

HON. RUSH D. HOLT

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 22, 2003

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing The Voter Confidence and Increased Accessibility Act of 2003.

After the Florida voting debacle of the 2000 election, we in Congress recognized that we had to act to restore the integrity and reliability of our electoral system by making dimpled chads and other voting irregularities a thing of the past. Last October, we enacted the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), groundbreaking election reform legislation that is currently helping states throughout the country replace antiquated and unreliable punch cards and butterfly ballots. Early this month, the newly-formed New Jersey HAVA Commission held it's first meeting. From those Commissioners and others I know, there is a great deal of enthusiasm about the increased Federal involvement in oversight, funding and guidance with respect to the conduct of elections for Federal office.

But HAVA could have an adverse, unintended consequence. It is fueling a headlong rush by states and localities to purchase computer voting systems that suffer from a serious flaw. It generates suspicion about the voting. You, the voter, have no way of knowing if your vote is recorded as you intended.

Imagine it's Election Day 2004. You enter your local polling place and cast your vote on a brand new "touch screen" voting machine. The screen is large and well lit, and your choices are clearly spelled out before you. In fact, it looks as easy to use as the ATM at your bank. You breathe a sigh of relief that you no longer have to figure out a complicated butterfly ballot or pull a lever. So you make a choice and touch the corresponding button to cast your vote. The screen says your vote has been counted. As you exit the voting booth, however, you begin to wonder: how do I know if the machine actually recorded my vote correctly. The fact is, you don't. No one knows.

That is why hundreds of nationally-renowned computer scientists, including David Dill of Stanford University, consider a voter-verified paper trail to be a critical safeguard for the accuracy, integrity and security of computer-assisted elections.

Without a physical record of votes cast, how will election officials in 2004 be able to launch an effective, honest recount in a closely contested election? How will they be able to ensure that a computer hacker has not tampered with votes?

Dr. Rebecca Mercuri, also a nationally renowned expert on this subject and a constituent of mine, asks on her website: "Think the November 5, 2002 US General Election went smoothly? Use your favorite Web engine and search for the words 'election' and 'glitch'—a recent scan on Google News turned up hundreds of disturbing press reports." Not all of these reported troubles were in Florida. They were in Texas, Alabama, Nevada, Georgia, California, South Carolina, Nebraska, and New Jersey. Voter News Service (VNS), the agency that provides exit poll data that might have been used as a cross-check against computerized returns, was coincidentally knocked out of service by an unidentified 'massive computer glitch' on Election Day as well. Many of the election problems (including those at VNS) occurred in spite of hundreds of millions of dollars (soon to be billions) spent on new equipment.

In the 2002 election, brand new computer voting systems used in Florida lost over 100,000 votes due to a software error. In New Jersey, several voting irregularities have been reported and, in one instance, a mainframe computer deployed to rapidly tally election results broke down entirely and had to be re-placed in the last minute by bookkeepers using adding machines. In fact, in the 2000 election, it was also reported that in an election in South Brunswick in my congressional district, one new touch-screen machine simply did not record any votes at all for one Republican candidate and one Democratic candidate. The manufacturer was quoted in the Washington Post as saying "no votes were lost—they were just never registered." The election officials in charge were quoted as saying "it didn't matter whether the fault was the voters" or the machine's, the expected votes were gone."

In Georgia, the entire state voted on 22,000 brand new touch-screen machines purchased in 2001 at a cost of $54 million. The Washington Post reported that when used in the November 2002 general election, "some people touched one candidate's name on the screen and saw another candidate's name appear as their choice. Voters who were paying attention had a chance to correct the error before finalizing their vote, but those who weren't did not." It is also disturbing to note that immediately prior to the election, a "patch" (a modification to the voting machines" software program) was installed on the new machines. Although the patch reportedly "was checked before it was installed," it also reportedly was not checked by election or certification officials. Nonetheless, the official who oversaw the statewide upgrade in Georgia declared that the voters were happy with how the system operated.

Maryland also installed new touch screen machines in five counties that were first used in the November 2002 general election. Again, the election official who oversaw the purchase of the new equipment was reported in the Washington Post as saying "the system performed flawlessly in two statewide elections. The public has a lot of confidence in it, and they love it." But, as Professor David Dill observes, "I'm not concerned with elections that are a mess. I'm concerned about elections that appear to go smoothly, and no one knows that it was all messed up inside the machine." A Maryland reporter wrote an article on exactly that danger, immediately after the November 2002 election, using the incident in which the computer betting system used in the Breeder's Cup Race was tampered with as a cautionary and analogous example.

Not all election officials want to rely on voting technology that produces no voterverified record. Warren Slocum, Chief Elections Officer & Assessor-County ClerkRecorder for San Mateo County, California actively and enthusiastically endorses the use of voting equipment that produces a voter-verified paper trail. He says, "the most naive argument against a paper trail is that the machines are accurate and tested properly before the election. It is argued that we don't need to worry about hackers, Trojan Horses or programming mistakes.... Surprisingly, some elections professionals say that touchscreen voting systems can be trusted. But when voters are given the choice, most say 'absolutely not.' And the computer scientists who have studied this issue say no way."

Across the country, in growing numbers, people are studying and reading about electronic voting and saying—"wait a minute .... "

With the 2004 election around the corner and states lining up to buy new computerized voting machines, Congress needs to act immediately before it's too late. We need to